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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-eighth session
(2-6 October 2017)

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I. Introduction

A. Opening of the session

1. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme held its sixty-eighth plenary session at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, from 2-6 October 2017. It was opened by the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Rosemary McCarney (Canada).

B. Representation

2. The following Executive Committee members were represented at the session:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Holy See, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen and Zambia.

3. Other United Nations Member States present as observers were as follows:

Albania, Angola, Andorra, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Iraq, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Panama, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

4. United Nations non-Member States present as observers were as follows:

State of Palestine.

5. The European Union was represented as an observer.

6. Also present were the following intergovernmental organizations and other entities:

African Union, Commonwealth of Independent States, Council of Europe, Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Economic Community of West African States, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, International Development Law Organization, League of Arab States, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, International Community of the Red Cross, International

Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Sovereign Order of Malta.

7. The United Nations system was represented as follows:

Food and Agriculture Organization; International Labour Organization; International Organization for Migration; International Telecommunication Union; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Human Settlements Programme; United Nations Institute for Training and Research; United Nations Office at Geneva; World Bank Group; World Food Programme; World Health Organization; World Metrological Organization.

8. Some 53 non-governmental organizations and other partners were in attendance. The International Chamber of Commerce was also present as a guest.

C. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

9. The Executive Committee adopted by consensus the following agenda (A/AC.96/LXVIII/1):

1. Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Statement by the High Commissioner.
3. Special segment on the comprehensive refugee response framework.
4. General debate.
5. Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee:
   (a) International protection;
   (b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight.
6. Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation.
7. Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2018-2019.
8. Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations.
9. Other statements.
10. Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2018.
11. Consideration of the provisional agenda of the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee.
12. Election of officers.
13. Any other business.
14. Adoption of the report of the sixty-eighth session of the Executive Committee.
15. Closing of the session.

D. Election of officers for the sixty-ninth session

10. Under Rule 10 of its Rules of Procedure, the Committee elected the following officers by acclamation, to serve the Committee from the day immediately following their election to the end of the last day of the following annual plenary session:

Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Ms. Suraya DALIL (Afghanistan)
1st Vice-Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Mr. Boudjemâa DELMI (Algeria)
2nd Vice-Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Mr. Geert MUYLLE (Belgium)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Juan Carlos MORENO GUTIERREZ (Colombia)

II. Work of the sixty-eighth session

11. A summary of the general debate, delivered by the Chairperson, is contained in the annex.

12. The High Commissioner's statements delivered during the session and summary records of each meeting will be made available on UNHCR's website http://www.unhcr.org/excom.

III. Conclusions and decisions of the Executive Committee

A. Conclusion on machine-readable travel documents for refugees and stateless persons

13. The Executive Committee,

Recalling the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) and the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954 Convention), in particular article 28 and the Schedules and Annexes to these Conventions,

Emphasizing that the protection of refugees is primarily the responsibility of all States and *strongly emphasizing*, in this context, the importance of active international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing,

Recalling further previous Executive Committee conclusions on travel documents, in particular Conclusion No 13 (XXIX) 1978, Conclusion No 18 (XXXI) 1980, para (i), and Conclusion No 49 (XXXVIII) 1987, as well as Conclusion No 112 (LXVII) 2016 on international cooperation from a protection and solutions perspective,

Acknowledging with appreciation the contributions of host states in receiving and providing international protection to large numbers of refugees, including in protracted situations and with limited resources,

Recognizing the importance of travel documents for refugees and stateless persons to facilitate their travel and the importance of granting visas to holders of these travel documents, where required for the implementation of durable solutions for refugees and complementary pathways to protection and solutions and other travel for refugees and stateless persons, thereby reducing the risk of irregular movement which may expose refugees and stateless persons to exploitation, abuse, violence and human trafficking,

Noting that international standards and specifications for travel documents have undergone significant developments since the 1951 and 1954 Conventions were drafted, and that the effective realization of the right set out in article 28 of these Conventions can best be achieved if refugees and stateless persons have access to travel documents in line with international standards adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Annex 9 (Facilitation) to the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention),

Noting Amendment 25 of Annex 9 to the 1944 Chicago Convention adopted by the ICAO Council in June 2015, which requires that travel documents for refugees and stateless persons (Convention Travel Documents) are machine readable in accordance with the specifications of Doc 9303,

Expressing appreciation for the revised Guide for Issuing Machine-Readable Convention Travel Documents for Refugees and Stateless Persons jointly issued by UNHCR and ICAO in February 2017, which incorporates guidance on the implementation of ICAO standard 3.12,

Noting the practice of some States in issuing electronically enabled machine-readable Convention Travel Documents with biometric identification capacity,

Noting also the benefits associated with the increased security features provided by machine-readable travel documents, and the importance of secure travel documents in promoting effective traveller identification, reducing the risk of document fraud, alteration and counterfeit, and facilitating global and reciprocal acceptance of travel documents,

Emphasizing the importance of safeguards to protect personal data, such as those referred to in UNHCR's Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern,

1. *Stresses* the need for all States and other relevant stakeholders to intensify their efforts to create, expand or facilitate access to appropriate durable solutions and complementary pathways for refugees and stateless persons, in particular in order to support those communities and countries hosting large refugee populations;

2. *Stresses* the need for countries of origin to contribute to conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation and return, including through addressing root causes and providing the necessary travel documents;

3. *Welcomes* the efforts of States that have already transitioned to machine-readable Convention Travel Documents in accordance with ICAO standard 3.12 and Doc 9303, and *calls upon* States parties to the 1951 and 1954 Conventions to consider taking all the necessary legislative, administrative and technical measures, taking into account their legal frameworks and national capacities, to introduce machine-readable Convention Travel Documents for refugees and stateless persons lawfully staying in their territory;

4. *Acknowledges* the good practices of States parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol, and/or to the 1954 Convention in relation to the issuance of machine-readable travel documents to refugees and stateless persons which enable them to access these travel documents, such as the simplification and facilitation of procedures and other administrative requirements, as well as of machine-readable travel document production systems, and *invites* States parties to exchange their good practices with interested States parties;

5. *Acknowledges* the good and voluntary practices of States not parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol, and/or to the 1954 Convention, in issuing machine-readable travel documents to refugees and stateless persons, and

invites them to share these practices so as to encourage other States not parties to these Conventions to enable refugees and stateless persons to access appropriate travel documents in accordance with their legal frameworks and national capacities, including in the pursuit of durable solutions and complementary pathways;

6. *Recognizes* the importance of early and effective registration and documentation of refugees, consistent with legal frameworks, taking into account the specificity of each situation;

7. *Commits* to further strengthening international solidarity and equitable responsibility- and burden-sharing, so as to ease the pressure on host States, including in facilitating the transition to and continued issuance of machine-readable travel documents to refugees and stateless persons, through the mobilization of financial resources and the provision of capacity-building and technical support, as appropriate, in collaboration with ICAO and UNHCR.

B. General decision on administrative, financial and programme matters

14. The Executive Committee,

1. *Recalls* that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-seventh session, approved programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under the biennial programme budget 2016-2017 (revised), as set out in document A/AC.96/1158, amounting to $7,309,704,332 for 2017; *notes* the reduction in the annual programme budget for the Middle East and North Africa region of $178,913,103; notes that the additional needs under supplementary budgets in 2017 amount to $632,466,025 as at 30 June 2017; *approves* the total current requirements for 2017 amounting to $7,763,257,254; and *authorizes* the High Commissioner, within these total appropriations, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets;

2. *Confirms* that the activities proposed in the biennial programme budget for the years 2018-2019 as set out in document A/AC.96/1169, are consistent with the Statute of the Office of the High Commissioner (A/RES/428 (V)); the High Commissioner's other functions as recognized, promoted or requested by the General Assembly, the Security Council or the Secretary-General; and the relevant provisions of the financial rules for voluntary funds administered by the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/503/Rev.10);

3. *Approves* the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under the proposed 2018-2019 biennial programme budget, as set out in document A/AC.96/1169 and amounting to $7,508,414,121 and $7,352,322,813 for 2018 and 2019 respectively, including the United Nations regular budget contribution towards headquarters costs, the reserves, and the Junior Professional Officer programme; and *authorizes* the High Commissioner, within this total appropriation, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets;

4. *Takes note* of the financial statements for the year 2016 as contained in the Report of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly on the financial report and audited financial statements of the voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the year ended 31 December 2016 (A/72/5/Add.6) and the Report by the High Commissioner on key issues and measures taken in response to the recommendations in the Report of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/1168/Add.1); and *requests* to be kept regularly informed on the measures taken to address the recommendations and the observations raised in these documents;

5. *Requests* the High Commissioner, within the resources available, to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs indicated under the biennial programme budget for the years 2018-2019, encourages his Office to be as efficient and effective as possible with the funds provided while not diminishing life-saving protection and assistance to persons of concern, and authorizes him, in the case of additional emergency needs that cannot be met fully from the operational reserve, to create supplementary budgets and issue special appeals under all pillars, with such adjustments being reported to the subsequent Standing Committee meeting for consideration;

6. *Acknowledges with appreciation* the burden that continues to be shouldered by developing and least developed countries hosting refugees; and *urges* Member States to recognize this valuable contribution to the protection of refugees and to participate in efforts to promote durable solutions and more equitable burden- and responsibility sharing; and

7. *Urges* Member States, in light of the extensive needs to be addressed by the Office of the High Commissioner, and in parallel with the long-standing and substantial support provided by refugee-hosting countries, to respond generously and in a spirit of solidarity to his appeal for resources to meet in full the 2018-2019 biennial programme budget and to ensure that the Office is resourced in a timely and predictable manner, while keeping earmarking to a minimum level.

C. Decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2018

15. The Executive Committee,

Having reviewed the issues before it at its sixty-eighth session, and bearing in mind the decisions adopted at that session,

1. *Decides* to convene three formal meetings of the Standing Committee in 2018, to be held in March, June and September;

2. *Reaffirms* its decision on the framework for the Standing Committee's programme of work (A/AC.96/1003 paragraph 25, sub-paragraph 2(c)); *authorizes* the Standing Committee to add and delete items, if appropriate, to this framework for its meetings in 2018; and *requests* member States to meet in December 2017 to prepare a detailed work plan for formal adoption by the Standing Committee at its first meeting in 2018;

3. *Calls upon* its members to continue efforts to ensure that debate at the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee is of a substantive and interactive nature, yielding practical guidance and clear advice to the High Commissioner, in keeping with the Committee's statutory functions;

4. *Calls upon* the Office of the High Commissioner to be explicit and analytical in its reports and presentations to the Committee and to submit documentation in a timely manner; and

5. *Further requests* the Standing Committee to report on its work to the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee.

D. Decision on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2017-2018

16. The Executive Committee,

1. *Approves* applications by the following Government observer delegations for participation in meetings of the Standing Committee from October 2017 to October 2018:

Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Honduras, Iraq, Myanmar, Nepal and Zimbabwe;

2. *Authorizes* the Standing Committee to decide upon any additional applications from Government observer delegations to participate in its meetings during the aforementioned period;

3. *Approves* the following list of intergovernmental and international organizations to be invited by the High Commissioner to participate as observers in relevant meetings of its Standing Committee from October 2017 to October 2018:

United Nations specialized agencies, departments, funds and programmes; African Union; Council of Europe; East African Community; Economic Community of Central African States; Economic Community of West African States; European Union; Executive Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States; Intergovernmental Authority on Development; International Centre for Migration Policy Development; International Committee of the Red Cross; International Development Law Organization, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; League of Arab States; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States; International Organisation of La Francophonie; Organization of Islamic Cooperation; the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; Southern African Development Community; and Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

E. Decision on the provisional agenda of the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee

17. The Executive Committee,

Recalling its decision on working methods adopted at its fifty-fifth plenary session (A/AC.96/1003 paragraph 25),

Decides to adopt as the provisional agenda for the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee the standard model contained in sub-paragraph 1(f) of the above-mentioned decision.

F. Decision on the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings

18. The Executive Committee,

Recalling rule 38 of its Rules of Procedure (A/AC.96/187/Rev.8) and its decision on the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee adopted at its sixty-seventh plenary session,

Approves the application by the European Union to participate as an observer in the Committee's private meetings on asylum and refugee matters within its competence during the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee.

Annex

Chairperson's summary of the general debate

The Chairperson summarized the general debate of the sixty-eighth session of the Executive Committee as follows:

Let me say that I have been struck by the depth and substantive nature of the interventions at this Executive Committee meeting. It is a challenge to do any justice to them in a chair's summary. I will cluster them into six categories: the general operating environment, protection, solutions, the comprehensive refugee response framework, the global compact on refugees and UNHCR.

Let me begin by recalling four days ago the message of the High Commissioner. In his opening remarks to the Committee on Monday morning, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, recalled the historic commitments made by all 193 United Nations Member States in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016. He expressed deep concern about new and protracted situations of forced displacement, dangerous movements by sea, and the deteriorating protection environment faced by refugees in some countries. But he also expressed hope. Hope that fundamental change is underway through the comprehensive refugee response framework, or CRRF, and the global compact on refugees. Hope that these initiatives will enable us to work together to make the international refugee response more equitable and predictable. And hope that empathy and solidarity will prevail over prejudice and fear.

In the special segment that followed, the President of the World Bank Group, Dr. Jim Yong Kim, confirmed that addressing forced displacement is an important part of the development agenda and outlined the steps that the World Bank Group is taking in this regard. We also heard a diverse range of perspectives on the CRRF from States implementing the framework, countries hosting large numbers of refugees, civil society and the private sector. These perspectives converged on number of key points in terms of the road ahead. In particular, panellists identified the best practice approaches of countries hosting large numbers of refugees and advised that the support they receive from the international community is meeting neither expectations, nor needs. They called for enhanced burden- and responsibility sharing; a renewed focus on solutions; and earlier, more innovative engagement to help prevent and resolve these crises.

General operating environment

More than 820 individuals registered to attend this year's Executive Committee meeting, including representatives from 149 States. A record number of interventions were made during the general debate, demonstrating that protecting, assisting and finding solutions for refugees are truly global issues in need of a global response. Delegations expressed unequivocal concern for the 65.6 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes. In addition to persecution, conflict and other situations of violence, you noted that underdevelopment, poverty, climate change, environmental degradation, epidemics and exclusion were also contributing factors in forced displacement. While the situation in Bangladesh was often at the forefront of discussions, you did not forget the protection and assistance needs of other displaced people. In fact, you asked the international community to remember that, just like the big crises, smaller, often overlooked ones continue to take a toll on countries around the world.

Protection

Many delegations recognized that the responsibility for protecting refugees continues to fall disproportionately on low- and middle-income countries, most of which struggle to keep their borders open despite development challenges of their own. While the generosity of these countries was commended, you acknowledged that there needed to be a more equitable application of the international refugee protection regime — that forced displacement is a new normal, requiring a new way of working.

You highlighted the efforts underway to establish and strengthen national asylum systems and noted that the ability to return people not in need of international protection was essential to the integrity of these systems. You underscored the importance of adopting age-, gender- and diversity sensitive approaches, and preventing and responding to sexual and gender based violence. You encouraged States to see border security and refugee protection as compatible goals, and to find alternatives to detention, to counter xenophobia, and to offer better protection to those displaced by disasters and the effects of climate change. The suggestion that our treatment of refugees and host communities could be considered a litmus test of our humanity gave us all pause for thought. At frequent points we asked ourselves: as countries, as regions, as a community, how do we fare?

UNHCR's #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024 continued to receive widespread support, noting that the denial of citizenship can impact negatively on the enjoyment of other rights and further drive displacement. A high-level event on statelessness is planned for 2019 so that progress towards the campaign's goals can be reviewed and additional momentum can be built. Ahead of the 20th anniversary of the "Guiding principles on internal displacement" in 2018, delegations also reflected on the need for stronger and more predictable engagement in support of IDPs. Conscious that they could become the refugees of the future, UNHCR's increased efforts to protect and assist IDPs were welcomed.

Solutions

In line with the international community's call for a renewed focus on finding durable solutions for refugees, delegations drew attention to developments in voluntary repatriation, third country resettlement and local integration. You stressed that returns must be voluntary and take the reabsorption capacity of countries of origin into account. As an important protection mechanism and expression of solidarity with refugee host countries, concerns were also raised about the gap between resettlement needs and available spaces. Addressing the root causes of forced displacement was identified as the ultimate solution and an urgent priority for the international community. Pending durable solutions, States were encouraged to continue to pursue complementary pathways to admission, include refugees in national health and education systems, and implement initiatives aimed at fostering greater self-reliance, especially through access to labour markets. We were asked to treat refugees not as burdens but as assets capable of participating fully in the decisions that affect their lives and contributing to the communities in which they live.

The comprehensive refugee response framework

You reiterated your support for the commitments made in the New York Declaration and welcomed UNHCR's "whole-of-society" approach to developing and initiating the CRRF. Delegations expressed strong support for the 11 countries applying the CRRF, applauding the progress that has been made to date and the

regional approaches that are being pursued in Africa and in Central America. You appealed for refugees to be at the centre of the framework and for its application to empower people with specific needs, including women, children and those with disabilities. While the CRRF was characterized as a practical mechanism for enhanced burden- and responsibility-sharing with refugee host countries, we were reminded of the need for concrete action, increased and more predictable funding, and a means of better capturing and communicating the significant contributions that have been made to date.

Global compact on refugees

Never before have we been in such urgent need of a global compact on refugees. This was what you conveyed time and time again. Having underscored the importance of inclusivity, delegations committed to continued and constructive participation in the thematic discussions, stocktaking process and formal consultations that will lead to the compact's development. You also made a number of requests. Protection must be at the compact's core. International responses to large-scale refugee movements must be made equitable. Additional obligations must not be imposed on refugee host countries. The good practices and lessons learned from contexts outside of the CRRF must be incorporated. In addition, you asked for a practical programme of action and noted that complementarities with the global compact on migration need to be addressed. There was a sense of optimism about what we can achieve but also an emphasis on the political will required for us to get there.

UNHCR

You reaffirmed your support for UNHCR's protection mandate and welcomed the five strategic directions — "protect", "respond", "include", "empower" and "solve" — that will guide the Office's engagement with people of concern from 2017 to 2021 and beyond. You acknowledged the risks that UNHCR staff often face in safeguarding the rights of the displaced and expressed appreciation for their dedication. The reform initiatives currently underway in UNHCR were considered necessary to ensure the Office's ability to respond rapidly and effectively to future crises. And while States and other partners have responded generously to recent humanitarian appeals, delegations highlighted the negative impact of funding gaps and inequalities, particularly on operations in Africa. In line with the "Grand Bargain" commitments, you advocated that States provide more multi-year and un-earmarked funding to UNHCR and encouraged the Office to find more innovative and cost effective ways of working, including by further increasing engagement with the private sector and expanding the use of cash-based interventions.

Conclusion

Out of the many valuable contributions that have been made over the past few days, two key messages have emerged that warrant repeating. Firstly, there is no country or region that can address the current global forced displacement crisis on its own. We need to work together, with refugees at the heart of our response.

Secondly, and notwithstanding the significant achievements that have been made to date, it is clear that we are at a crossroads in terms of turning the commitments that were made in the New York Declaration into action. We have, in the form of the CRRF and the global compact on refugees, a true opportunity to transform the ways in which we respond to large movements of refugees. We must not let it pass us by. We must find the political will to genuinely ease the pressure on host countries and communities and to help those displaced to rebuild their lives.

We must translate our expressions of solidarity into practical policies and mechanisms. As one delegation said in their statement yesterday, this will be an exercise of humanity and solidarity the world has never witnessed before. We must turn the hopes that we have all expressed for the future, said so clearly by the High Commissioner on Monday morning, into a reality.

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